DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 086 CG 026 901

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TITLE "Countersociopathy": Dealing with Today's Aggressive Telemarketers and Salespeople.
PUB DATE 11 Aug 96
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (104th, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 11, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Assertiveness; *Communication Skills; *Consumer Education; *Consumer Protection; Dialogs (Language); Interpersonal Communication; *Persuasive Discourse; *Resistance (Psychology)
IDENTIFIERS Telemarketing

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to propose the construct of "countersociopathy" and specific activities consumers can undertake in a variety of sales conditions and situations. These activities are not only designed to passively neutralize the telemarketer's or salesperson's aggressiveness, but can lead to the salesperson wanting to quickly terminate the encounter with the consumer, rather than the other way around. The basic tenet of "countersociopathy" is for consumers to become passively concrete in expressing themselves. For example, if approached in a store by a salesperson asking, "May I help you?", the appropriate passively concrete response would be, "What would you like to help me do?", said with a quizzical or blank look on one's face. "Countersociopathy" can become an empowering and entertaining modality for those who use it in response to overly aggressive salespeople and solicitors. It does not require one to become hostile when using it, and the response tends to throw the samesperson or solicitor so off guard that they do not know how to respond. (TS)

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"*COUNTERSOCIOPATHY*": DEALING WITH TODAY'S AGGRESSIVE TELEMARKETERS AND SALESPEOPLE

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American Psychological Association
Toronto, Ontario, CANADA
Sunday, August 11, 1996

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose the construct of "*countersociopathy*" and specific activities consumers can undertake in a variety of sales conditions and situations. These activities are not only designed to *passively neutralize* the salesperson's aggressiveness, but can lead to the salesperson wanting to quickly terminate the encounter with the consumer, rather than the other way around.

"*COUNTERSOCIOPATHY*": DEALING WITH TODAY'S AGGRESSIVE TELEMARKETERS AND SALESPEOPLE

The past several years have seen an increase in the number of businesses and solicitors utilizing advanced electronic and telephone technology to improve sales or contributions. Coupled with this change has been a decrease in the amount of available time consumers have to purchase necessary or desired items and services, with consumers desiring greater convenience and flexibility to literally shop from the confines of home. This has led to a proliferative explosion of telemarketing cold-calls from not only every conceivable type of business, but also from political figures, political action groups, public sector organizations, public service agencies, etc., soliciting funds for their causes. In addition, corporate America is now downsizing itself, with the prevailing corporate philosophy being "*leaner and meaner*". The business sector is using technology and an economically motivated, highly aggressive sales force in an effort to further define and increase not only their market niche, but also their corporate bottom line. Businesses are also aware that consumers are using technology in the form of "*caller-ID*" to assist them in determining which phone calls they will to take, and which will result in future blockings.

Concommitant with the changes in technology, comes a growing new breed of entrepreneurs who border on *sociopathy* (Winslow &

Solomon, 1989), *pleonexy*, or pathological greed (Richardson & Manaster, 1992), or both, and have managed to train a crack force of economically motivated, highly-aggressive salespeople who are difficult for the average consumer to deal with (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). "*Countersociopathy*" is an approach that can help consumers quickly and efficiently dispose of unwanted telemarketing callers, door-to-door solicitors, and street people, in a very passive, non-threatening, unassuming fashion.

While consumers do have the right to demand their name be removed from a company's call list, there are no guarantees it will occur. However, the average consumer has not been well-prepared in fending off the new breed of aggressive salesperson. Consumers also remain basically reluctant and unassertive when dealing with aggressive telemarketers and salespeople, preferring the high road of avoiding conflict, with many unable or unwilling to express anger over intrusive sales calls (Fine & Schumann, 1992).

For example, how many times have you gotten to the point of sitting down to a family dinner and the telephone rings ? On the line is a telemarketer cold-calling you about either free estimates on a variety of home related services; purchasing products or services; or contributing to a variety of political or non-political causes. You try to quickly terminate the call, but the telemarketer seems determined to get in the last word. How about the last time you took a walk in a large city and were besieged by those representing themselves as "homeless" and

trying to panhandle money; or those who represent a variety of religious groups ("Moonies"; Krishna; etc.) soliciting funds you either do not have, or do not care to give ? How about the last time you were just sitting at home only to have the doorbell ring and you find door-to-door salespeople, or members of religious sects, seeking either a financial contribution, or merely to "save your soul" ?

Were you able to extricate yourself from these situations without losing your temper, or without caving in and giving these people some amount of your time and/or money ? If not, you and others might benefit from using applied psychology in the form of "*countersociopathy*", to put a quick finish to what appears to be an endless assault on consumers.

"*Countersociopathy*" grew out of an experience I had in 1980 while visiting New York City, however, the name was not coined until 1985. While standing outside St. Patrick's Cathedral, I was approached by a young man carrying a large book and pamphlets. I also noticed that he was wearing a photo identification badge issued by the City of New York as a solicitor, and happened to quickly catch the name on his tag before he got close enough to speak. He asked me if I was a tourist and what area of the country I was from. After hearing I was from the midwest, he indicated he was from Iowa. After some very brief small talk, he said I must be religious since I had come to see St. Patrick's Cathedral, and that he had religious information I might be interested in. The young man then asked me what line of work I was in. My

response, using his name, which was never mentioned during our brief conversation, "*Well, Bruce, it is most unusual that we meet under such an unusually random circumstance.....I am a religious deprogrammer, and your parents asked me to come here to find you and bring you home* !" I have never seen anyone look so terrified and run away from me so fast in my life. In fact, the word spread so quickly amongst those standing in the vicinity that the scene resembled Moses' parting of the Red Sea. It has only been in the last five years that I have managed to use "*countersociopathy*" in a variety of sales/soliciting situations.

The basic tenet of "*countersociopathy*" is for consumers to become passively concrete in expressing themselves. For example, if approached in a store by a salesperson asking, "*May I help you ?*"; the appropriate passively concrete response would be, "*What would you like to help me do ?*", said with a quizzical or blank look on one's face. Should a telemarketer call offering a line of home services (air-conditioning; asphalt paving; carpeting; aluminum siding, etc.) the "*countersociopathic*" consumer should quickly indicate interest, but then ask the telemarketer to clear it first with the consumer's landlord, even if there is no landlord. Many telemarketing cold-calls presume the potential consumer *owns* the residence in which they live. Once telemarketers hear about a landlord, they cannot terminate the phone call quickly enough. This could possibly remove the consumer's name from the listing altogether, with that information being passed along to

other companies who might purchase these calling lists.

Other common telemarketing calls are from insurance companies offering auto insurance; the restaurant industry; charitable organizations; and financial service companies. The easiest way of handling these calls is to tell the caller that you are in exactly the same line of work as the company they claim to represent, and to jokingly say that you will "buy theirs if they buy yours". Restauranteurs can be told that you work in their industry with the last thing you want to do after working all day is to go to a restaurant, and charitable organizations can be told you work for a rival charity. Financial service companies can be told you do business with a rival firm. Invariably, the caller will desire to terminate the call.

Any type of religious solicitations will usually start with someone asking if they can have a few minutes of your time to discuss the various teachings of the religion they represent. There are a couple of suitable responses to the question, such as, "*I'd be glad to give you a few minutes, providing I can tell you about my religion first*", or, "*Before you start, I think you should know that I am a medical provider and firmly believe in blood transfusions and operations*". Few solicitors will want to stick around if you make a few minutes of your time a reciprocal condition.

Street panhandlers have become a greater problem in the past several years because their numbers have seemingly multiplied and they are a hauntingly visible presence in most major cities. The first

thing a traveler must do is be aware of their surroundings at all times. Some panhandlers tend to stake out a spot from which to beg, perhaps out of superstitious behavior, and they do not like to leave that spot for fear someone else will take it (Toronto; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.). Others are more actively mobile (Los Angeles). You may pass them standing on the street and feel that passing them eliminated the problem of having to deal with them. They will approach quickly, trying to get in your line of sight so as not to scare you. The line typically used is that they need either spare change, or a couple dollars to get clothes back from the cleaners, or for gas to a car that died just off the freeway. A couple of suitable responses are, "*Cash.....aren't you aware we are in a cashless society now ? Do you take plastic* ?", or, "*I am a strong believer of the Christian faith, and more than money, you need your clothes. So, take me to your dry cleaner. We must make sure the job was done to your specifications*". In the first response, a more enterprising street hustler might suggest you head to an automatic teller machine (ATM) to use your credit card to get money. You should never show them the credit card and tell them you are not authorized for ATM use. In the second response, the person will only want money from you. There is no way they will allow you to go anywhere with them.

In short, "*countersociopathy*", can become an empowering and entertaining modality for those who use it in response to overly aggressive salespeople and solicitors. It does not require one to

become hostile when using it and the response tends to throw the salesperson or solicitor so off guard that they do not know how to respond back.

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